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before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE
AND AGENCY ORGANIZATION
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

"Telecommuting: A 21st Century Solution to Traffic Jams and Terrorism"

July 18, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today on behalf of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to talk

about telework. I would like to start by discussing OPM's continued support for telework in the

Federal Government and the progress that we've made in the six months since our last testimony,

which focused on using telework to mitigate the impact of high gas prices. The dominant themes

in this period have involved the use of telework in agency Continuity of Operations Plans

(COOP) and pandemic health crisis, and I will discuss these issues shortly. I will also address

some of the questions that have been raised about the best ways to encourage the use of more

telework by Federal agencies.

OPM continues to work with Federal agencies to support their efforts to implement telework to

the broadest extent possible. OPM staff members have provided agencies with individualized

guidance and technical support through on-site visits, as well as providing one-on-one consultation to agency telework coordinators on an ongoing, as-needed basis.

We have revised the annual Agency survey to streamline the questions and enhance data collection, and are currently in the process of gathering the data for our next report. We met with agency telework coordinators last month to present the new survey and answer questions and concerns in advance of its release. We expect that over time this revised survey will enable us to better understand the status of agency telework programs and provide the support necessary to meet our legislative mandate.

Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) and pandemic health crisis planning have continued to increase interest in telework. As directed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for COOP and by the President's National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan, OPM is updating its telework guidance to include information about emergency planning. We are adding modules to the existing online training courses for managers and teleworkers, and we are substantially revising the telework guide that resides on the Interagency Telework Website.

The recent flooding in downtown DC highlighted the need for agencies to integrate telework into their COOP planning. In addition to relocating employees to alternate worksites, the affected agencies used home-based telework in some cases, and with GSA's recent offer of free telework center space, will use those options as well.

Some widely-reported security challenges have also increased the focus on telework. In our updated telework guide, we tell Federal employees and their managers that they are responsible for the security of Federal Government property and information, regardless of their work location. When employees' telework agency security policies do not change and should be enforced at the same rigorous level as when they are in the office. We refer to guidance from Office of Management and Budget and NIST for further explication of security requirements and their application in a telework environment.

Our plans for future activity include a redesign of the Interagency Telework Website, continued agency visits, and continued agency telework coordinator meetings addressing developing issues and questions. As part of the redesign of the telework website, we will be developing on-line telework materials designed to assist telework coordinators in promoting telework in their agencies. The materials will be formatted as templates and reproducible documents. We will also be adding to our training, with the development of classroom-style sessions for managers and supervisors that will be offered to all agencies, and interactive web-based courses ("webinars") facilitated by a telework expert.

All of this activity is in support of Federal agencies and agency coordinators, to provide them the information, materials, and training they need to grow effective telework programs. All of it is fairly basic because telework is not really a complicated program. There are certainly nuts-and-bolts issues of equipment, connectivity, security, and so forth, but none of these should represent substantial barriers to the broad implementation of telework. Telework is simply an extension of

what most eligible employees (and here I use "eligible" loosely to represent those who have

work that is portable) already do, which is using technology for remote communications.

E-mail, voicemail, teleconferencing and even videoconferencing and instant messaging are part

of the modern workplace. We use them whether we are sitting at a desk, at the office, at a

telecenter or at home. The barriers are more perceived than real.

"Management resistance" is often cited as the reason that telework is not working in an agency,

division, or workgroup. Section 359 of Public Law 106-346 requires that agencies have telework

policy and that they implement telework to the greatest extent possible, but in the end,

arrangements are really made between employees and their managers. For some managers,

managing teleworkers may feel uncomfortable. Again, they need to be reassured that telework is

not a radical departure from the way that work is being done already. In addition, the Federal

Government is working very hard at implementing effective performance management. In our

guidance about telework we tell managers that they need to manage by results, not by presence.

The same set of skills that managers must develop in order to meet the goals of performance

management is what they need to manage teleworkers. OPM provides excellent performance

management resources, including a publication available on the OPM website entitled "A

Handbook for Measuring Employee Performance." Managers who have mastered performance

management techniques have the skills in place to easily manage a "mixed" (i.e., some

teleworking and some not) or all-teleworking workgroup without difficulty.

In summation, I would like to make two main points. First, telework is not new, or mysterious,

or difficult. It is simply a way of getting work done that uses the same kinds of technologies that

enable work to be achieved in an agency office. Second, telework is not a panacea for all our ills. It is certainly one way to reduce traffic congestion, but in big metropolitan areas like the Washington, DC region, the traffic issue is multidimensional, and telework can only be one piece of a much broader approach to the problem. Similarly, for terrorism or other emergency situations, telework represents one method of mitigating the impact of such events on the ability of agencies to accomplish their work, but can by no means be considered, by itself, a solution. What telework can be, has proven to be, is an effective tool to support Federal employees in balancing their work and life and to help Federal agencies meet their performance objectives.

That concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to respond to any questions the Subcommittee may have.